

PEARLS

FROM THE

HIDDEN TREASURE OF HOLY MASS.

BY SAINT LEONARD OF PORT MAURICE.



IT REQUIRES great patience to endure the language of some worldlings whom we hear every day saying: "It is only a Mass more or less."—"It is so hard to be obliged to hear Mass on holidays."—"The Mass of that priest is as long as one in Holy Week; when I see him go to the altar, I always hurry out of church." He who speaks thus shows he has little or no esteem for the Most Holy Sacrifice. Do you know what the Holy Sacrifice is? It is the sum of Christianity, the soul of faith, the centre of the Catholic religion, the grand object of all her rights, her ceremonies, and her sacraments: it is, in a word, the summary of all that is good and beautiful in the Church of God. Now, let me beseech you, who read these pages, to ponder seriously on what I say in the following instructions.

It is an absolute certainty that all religions that ever existed from the beginning of the world had a sacrifice as an essential part of the worship they offered to God. But as their religions were either vain or imperfect, so were their sacrifices vain and imperfect. *Vainest of all vain things* were the sacrifices of the idolaters, nor need we prove this truth of Holy Writ. Those of the Hebrews, although they professed the true religion, are justly called by St. Paul *weak and poor elements* (Gal. iv. 9), because they could not forgive sin nor confer grace. The one great Sacrifice of our Holy Religion, the Holy Mass alone, is holy, perfect and in every respect complete: for by it the faithful render the highest honor to God, and, at the same time, acknowledge their own nothingness and the supreme dominion He has over all His creatures.

The Royal Prophet called this sacrifice the *sacrifice of justice* (Ps. iv. 5) as it contains the Just One Himself, or rather the Saint of Saints; and because it sanctifies souls by the infusion of divine grace, and replenishes them with the richest gifts

of heaven. As it is, then, a sacrifice so holy and so excellent, we will consider briefly some of the great treasures contained in this divine gift. I say *some* of these treasures, as it would be impossible for us to enumerate or explain them all.

The first question that suggests itself to us regarding the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is: In what does its principal excellence consist? It consists in this—namely, that it is essentially the same, yea, the very same, Sacrifice that was offered on the Cross of Calvary, the only difference being that the Sacrifice of the Cross was bloody and made once for all, and did then satisfy fully for all the sins of the world. The Sacrifice of the Altar, however, is an unbloody Sacrifice which can be repeated throughout all ages, and was instituted in order to apply to each of us the universal atonement which Christ made for us on Calvary.

In a word: the bloody Sacrifice was the instrument of redemption, and the unbloody Sacrifice puts us in possession of it: the one opened to us the treasury of the merits of Christ our Lord, and the other gives us the practical use of that never failing treasury. Hence, we must ever bear in mind that in the Mass there is made not a mere representation nor a simple commemoration of the Passion and Death of the Redeemer, but in a certain true sense there is offered the very same Most Holy Sacrifice that was offered on Calvary.

It may be then said, with all truth, our Redeemer returns to die mystically for us, although *He can die no more* really; at one and the same time, He is alive and as it were slain again, according to that passage of the Apocalypse, *I saw a Lamb standing as it were slain*. On Christmas Day the Church represents the birth of our Lord, but our Lord is not then born. At Ascension and Whitsuntide the Church again recalls to mind the ascent of our Lord to heaven, and the coming of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles and Disciples; still, it is not true

that as each of these festivals return, the Lord ascends to heaven, or that the Holy Ghost visibly descends to earth.

But the same cannot be said of the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, for here there is made no simple representation of a past event, but the very same Sacrifice which was offered on the Cross is here offered, though in an unbloody manner. That same Body, that same Blood, that same Jesus who then offered Himself on Calvary now offers Himself in the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "The work of our redemption," says the Church, "is here effected or continued." Yes, indeed, in the Mass is continuously offered the same Sacrifice which was offered on the Cross. O awful, solemn, and wonderful work of God!

Now tell me sincerely, when you go to the church to hear Mass, do you clearly realize that you are approaching Calvary, to be present at the death of your Redeemer? If this truth sank deeply into your heart, would you dare to enter the holy place with such a distracting air, or with such unbecoming apparel? If Magdalen had gone to Calvary, to the foot of the Cross, dressed out, perfumed and adorned, as in the time of her sinful life, what would have been said of her? But what ought to be said, if you profane these holy rites of the dread Sacrifice with careless behavior or sacrilegious thoughts, words or deeds?

Iniquity is detested by God at all times and in all places; but the sins committed under the shadow of the Altar bring down the signal chastisement of God, who says in Holy Writ, "Cursed be he who doth the work of the Lord deceitfully." Think seriously on this, while I continue to show you other marvels and glories of this most precious treasure.

It seems to me impossible for any religious rite to have a more excellent prerogative than this we have now considered; but its eminence is still more enhanced by having for its priest none other than God Himself, Jesus Christ, the God-Man. In this great Sacrifice three things should never be forgotten: the Priest who offers, the Victim offered, and the Majesty of Him to whom the offering is made. Now reflect on the wonderful glory of the Holy Sacrifice, and let each of these three con-

siderations be deeply impressed on your soul. The priest who offers the victim is the same Man-God Christ Jesus; nor is the sacrifice offered to any other than to God.

Revive then your faith, and recognize as the celebrant not so much the visible priest whom we see at the altar, as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the primary offerer not only because He has instituted this Holy Sacrifice, and has given to it all its efficacy, through His merits, but also because in each Mass He Himself, for love of us, deigns to change the bread and wine into His Most Holy Body and Most Precious Blood. Behold, then, the grandest privilege of the Most Holy Sacrifice, to have for priest, the God-Man; and when you see the celebrant at the altar, remember that his greatest dignity consists in being the minister of this invisible and eternal Priest, our Divine Redeemer.

Hence it follows that the Sacrifice itself cannot cease to be agreeable to God, no matter what may be the unworthiness of the priest who celebrates, since the principal offerer is Christ our Lord, and the priest is merely His minister. In the same way a person who gives alms by the hands of a servant is called in all truth the giver, and even though his servant may be sinful or wicked, when the master is good, the alms do not fail to have their reward. Blessed then be God, who hath bestowed on us a most holy Priest, who offers to the Eternal Father this Divine Sacrifice not only in every place—as the Catholic religion is now propagated in most countries of the world—but every day, and even every hour, since the sun rises for others when it sets for us.

At every hour, then, of the day and night this most holy Priest offers to His Father, His Blood, His Soul, and His entire self for us. All this He does as often as the Holy Sacrifice is celebrated in the whole world. O happy should we be if we could assist at all these Masses! O immense treasure! O mine of inexhaustible wealth, thus possessed by us in the Church of God! What an ocean of graces in this life, what a fund of glory in the next, would not the devout attendance at this Most Holy Sacrifice procure for us!

But why do I use the word attendance? For

those who hear Mass not only fulfil the office of attendants at it, but they are likewise offerers, and have a right to the title of priests according to the Apocalypse. *Thou hast made us to our God a kingdom and priests.* The celebrant is, as it were, the public minister of the Church in general, and at the same time a meditator for all the faithful, and particularly for those who assist at Mass, with the invisible Priest who is Christ; together with Christ he offers to the Eternal Father, both in behalf of all mankind and of himself, the great price of human redemption.

But the celebrant is not alone in this august function, since all those who assist at Mass unite with him in offering the Holy Sacrifice; and therefore he turns to the people and says, *Pray, brethren, that your Sacrifice and mine may be acceptable to God,* in order that we may understand that, although he acts the part of principal minister, all those who are present make the great offering with him.

Hence, when you assist at Mass, you perform in a certain manner the office of priest. Will you, then, ever again dare to hear Mass, sitting, whispering, looking here and there, perhaps even sleeping, or will you content yourself with reciting some vocal prayers, and entirely ignoring the tremendous office of priest which you are exercising? Alas! I cannot refrain from crying out, "O dull and senseless world, that will not understand such sublime mysteries!"

How is it possible anyone can remain with a mind distracted and a heart dissipated, at a time when the holy angels fall down in lowly adoration, trembling and astonished at the contemplation of such a stupendous work of Divine Goodness?

You are astonished, perhaps, to hear me call the Mass a stupendous work. But what tongue, human or angelic, can ever describe a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the priest at Mass? And who could have ever imagined that the voice of man, which of itself is not able to raise a straw from the ground, should be endowed with a power so stupendous as to bring the Son of God from heaven to earth.

This power far exceeds that which would be required to move mountains, to dry up seas, or to govern the movements of the heavenly bodies—nay

more, it rivals in a certain way that first *fiat* by which God created all things out of nothing; and in some manner it would seem to surpass that other *fiat* with which the Blessed Virgin drew down to her bosom the Eternal Word.

The Blessed John Buono, of Mantua, gave a very beautiful illustration of this to his companion, a hermit, who was unable to imagine how the words of a priest could be endowed with such a tremendous power, as to be able to change the substance of bread into the Body of Jesus Christ, and the substance of wine into His Blood. This unfortunate hermit had moreover, unhappily, consented to these doubts which the devil suggested. The holy servant of God, perceiving the poor sinful man's error, led him to a fountain from which he drew a vessel of water and gave it to him to drink. After he had drunk he protested that he never before, during his whole life, had tasted such delicious wine.

Then Blessed John Buono said to him, "Dear brother, does not this convince you of the marvelous truth of which you doubt? If through me, a miserable creature, water is changed into wine by Divine Power, how much more ought you to believe, that by virtue of the words pronounced by the priest, which are the words of God, the bread and wine are converted into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. And who shall dare to limit the power of God Almighty?" This so effectually enlightened the mind of the hermit, that, banishing every doubt from his mind, he did great penance for his sins.

Let us have but a lively faith, and it will convince us that the unspeakable excellences contained in this adorable Sacrifice are without number; nor shall we then be surprised to see the miracle repeated thousands and thousands of times, at every hour, and in every place. For the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ enjoys a sort of ubiquity, not granted to other bodies, but bestowed on Him through the merits of His life sacrificed to the will of His Father.

This multiplied existence of our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament was explained to an unbelieving Jew by an ignorant poor woman. The Jew was standing in the public street where there was a great crowd and among them this poor

woman, and at the moment a priest approached carrying the Blessed Sacrament to a sick person; all the people knelt and adored the Most Blessed Sacrament, as It passed; but the Jew alone moved not, nor showed any sign of reverence.

This being seen by the poor woman, she cried out to the Jew, "O miserable wretch, why do you not show reverence to the true God present in the most holy Sacrament?" "What true God?" answered the Jew; "if the true God were there it would follow that there are many Gods, as you say there is one on each of your altars during Mass." The woman immediately took a sieve and placing it between the Jew's eyes and the sun, told him to look at the rays which shone through the apertures.

When he had done so, she said to him, "Tell me now, Jew, are there many suns or only one passing through the openings in this sieve?" The Jew answering that there was but one sun, "Then," replied the woman, "why do you wonder if the God-Man, veiled in the Sacrament, though one, individual and unchanged, should, through excess of love for us, give Himself really and truly present on different altars at the same time?"

This simple illustration convinced the unbelieving Jew, and forced him to acknowledge this great truth of our holy Faith. O holy Faith! a single ray of thy divine light is sufficient to make the most illiterate to answer the captious questions of the enemies of religion. Who shall ever dare to assign limits to the almighty power of God? St. Teresa had such a conception of the omnipotence of God that she used to say, "The more incomprehensible, deep and abstruse the mysteries of our holy faith are to our understanding, the firmer and more devoutly ought we to believe them."

She was, indeed, justified in expressing herself thus, knowing that God Almighty can perform works infinitely greater than our limited intelligences can comprehend. Revive, then, your faith, and acknowledge that this Divine Sacrifice is the miracle of miracles, the marvel of marvels, and that its greatest excellence consists in being incomprehensible to our limited understandings. Amazed at such wonderful goodness of God, never cease repeating, "O inestimable treasure! treasure of love, beyond all human comprehension!"

This treasure of the Holy Mass revives our hopes, and encourages us to look for everlasting glory in that Paradise which cannot be lost except through our own folly and sinfulness. If, therefore, it is the duty of a Christian to centre his heart's affections on our altars, and to perfume them with incense and flowers of the sweetest odor, it is still more necessary to honor them with purity and modesty, since they are the mercy seats from which we derive all good.

And you, O priests, join your hands, and, with hearts thrilling with holy love, gratefully thank the Eternal Father for having placed you in the sweet necessity of often offering to Him this heavenly Victim; and, still more, let us thank Him for the countless blessings we can draw from it, if we be but faithful, not only in offering it, but in offering it for the sublime ends for which He bestowed a treasure so precious.

If, then, you set little value on the most holy Sacrifice, it is a certain sign that you fail to appreciate the vast gain it bestows on the living and the dead, on the just and sinners, during life and at the hour of death; nay, even after death itself. Imagine, then, you are the debtor of the Gospel, who overwhelmed by the heavy debt of ten thousand talents, and being commanded to pay, excused himself and piteously pleaded for time to satisfy his obligations. "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all."

This you should also do, who owe not only one but many debts to the bank of Divine Justice. You ought to humble yourself, and beg as much time as is needed for hearing Holy Mass, and be sure you will thus fully satisfy all your obligations and pay all your debts to Divine Justice. The Angelic Doctor teaches us what these debts are which each one owes to God; they are specially four, and each of them is infinite.

The *first* is to praise and honor the infinite majesty of God, which is infinitely worthy of all the praise and honor the creature can give Him.

The *second* is to satisfy for the many sins committed against His Infinite Majesty.

The *third* is to thank Him for the many favors received from Him.

The *fourth* is to supplicate Him as the giver of all good gifts.

Now, how can we miserable creatures, who depend on God for the very air we breathe, be able to repay Him for debts so numerous and so weighty? Let me at once, therefore, show you the easiest way of doing so; and let me add that this way of satisfying Divine Justice is one that must console me and you and the world. Let us take care to attend with all possible devotion as many Masses as we can; and let us strive to have them celebrated frequently for our intention; and thus were our debts as countless as the sands on the seashore, and as weighty as they can be, there is not the least doubt but that we shall be able to discharge them all fully and adequately, by the treasury we can draw from the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

But in order that you may have a fuller knowledge of each of these your debts, we shall explain them one by one; and you will then find a subject of great consolation in considering the inexhaustible wealth you possess for their payment in such a rich mine, from which you can draw on all occasions when you assist at Holy Mass.

The *first* debt which we owe to God is the duty of rendering Him supreme honor. It is a precept of the natural law that every inferior ought to show homage to his superior, and the greater his dignity the greater also ought to be the homage due to him. Hence it follows that, as God is infinitely great, we ought to return Him an homage worthy of His infinite goodness. But where can we miserable creatures find any offering worthy of His infinite grandeur.

Seek as you may among all the creatures of the universe, you will not find one worthy of God. Ah, no, an offering worthy of God must be God Himself. And He, who is seated on the throne of His own infinite greatness, He it is who must descend and lay Himself as a victim on our altars, in order that our homage may perfectly correspond with the eminence of His infinite majesty.

This is what takes place in Holy Mass. Almighty God is here honored as He deserves, because He is honored by God Himself. Jesus Christ, the Man-God, places Himself as our Victim on the altar, and adores the Most Holy Trinity with an

act of incomprehensible submission, such as no one else can offer; for all the offerings of all creatures compared to this self-humiliation of our Divine Redeemer are as the feeble glimmering of the stars before the meridian splendors of the sun. You wonder, perhaps, at this, but you are wrong; for our good Jesus is not only Man, but true and omnipotent God, and by humbling Himself on the altar, He offers to the Most Holy Trinity an infinite homage: so that we who unite with Him in offering this great sacrifice are thus enabled to present to God an homage and honor which is also infinite.

O stupendous truth! Let us repeat it over and over again, since it can never be too deeply engraven on our memories even we, by hearing Holy Mass with devotion can render God an honor and homage that is infinite. Be now confounded for very wonder, reflecting on this great truth, that a soul assisting devoutly at Holy Mass can give God more honor than that which all the Angels and Saints together can render Him with all their adorations. For after all, they, like ourselves, are mere creatures, and their homage is therefore limited and finite, whereas in the Mass, Jesus humbles Himself, a humiliation which is infinite in value and merit, and consequently the homage and honor which we render through Him in the Mass is an homage and honor which is infinite.

And since this grand truth cannot be doubted, ought we not to congratulate ourselves to be able to satisfy this first debt by assisting worthily at the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. O blind world! when will you open your eyes to understand a truth so grand and so important, and which so concerns your welfare. And yet, alas, you have the folly to say, "A Mass more or less matters little." O dreadful blindness!

Our *second* debt or obligation, by which we are bound towards God, is to satisfy His justice for our numberless and enormous sins. O what a measureless debt is this! One single mortal sin outweighs in the scale of Divine Justice all the good works of all the Martyrs, and of all the Saints who have ever existed, who live now, or who will live to the end of time. And yet, by means of the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, on account of its intrinsic value and holiness, we are enabled to make a com-

plete and adequate satisfaction for all the sins we have ever committed.

But in order that you may clearly understand how much you are indebted to Jesus Christ, consider seriously what I now say to you. Although He is the very person who has been offended and outraged by our sins, yet, not content with having satisfied Divine Justice for us on Calvary, He has given and continuously gives us the same means of satisfying for our sins, in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

For there is renewed in the Mass that offering which Jesus Christ had already made on the Cross to the Eternal Father for the sins of the whole world; that same Divine Blood which He poured out for the ransom of the entire human race, and the Mass is thus specially applied to each and every one of us, as it is offered for the sins of him who celebrates and for those who assist at so tremendous a sacrifice.

But here I must not be understood to say that the Mass by any means cancels our sins *immediately* by itself, as the Sacrament of Penance does; but it cancels them *mediately* by obtaining for us various aids, such as interior impulses, holy inspirations, and actual grace, all of which conduce to a true repentance for our sins, either during Mass, or at some other fitting time. For this reason, no one but God Himself, can know how many souls rise out of the slough of sin through the extraordinary aid they receive from the Most Holy Sacrifice.

Here I must add that although the Mass cannot aid a person in mortal sin by way of *propitiation*, it however helps him by way of *supplication*; hence all sinners ought to hear as many Masses as possible, in order that they may obtain the grace of conversion. To souls, however, who live in grace, it gives a wonderful strength, enabling them to remain in their happy state.

But you will now, perhaps, say to me: "It is then sufficient to hear one single Mass, or cause one Mass to be celebrated to get rid of all those weighty debts due to God on account of the many sins we have committed; because the Mass, being of infinite value, we can thereby render to God an infinite satisfaction." Do not, I beseech you, make such a hasty conclusion. The Mass, it is true, is of infinite

value in itself, but Almighty God accepts it only in a finite and limited manner, and in accordance with the greater or less perfection in the dispositions of him who celebrates, for whom it is offered, or who assists at the Sacrifice.

"Whose faith and devotion are known to thee," says Holy Church, in the Canon of the Mass. The Church thus teaches us by these words of the Canon what great divines hold. "That the greater or less satisfaction applied in behalf by the Sacrifice is determined by the greater or less dispositions of the celebrant or the assistants," as already mentioned. Consider, then, the folly of those who wish and seek for quickly celebrated Masses; and, what is worse, assist at them with little or no devotion. Consider with shame the culpable indifference of those who never have Masses celebrated for their spiritual and temporal welfare.

It is certain, according to St. Thomas, that all sacrifices *as sacrifices* are equal in dignity; but they are not equal as regards the effects that flow from them; hence the greater the actual or habitual piety of the celebrant the greater also will be the fruit of the application of the Mass; so that to make no distinction in this matter is to be indifferent whether the net you fish with be small or large. The same can be said of those who assist at Mass.

Although I most earnestly exhort you to hear as many Masses as you can, I yet feel bound to say, that you must have more regard for the devotion in hearing than for the number heard. If you have more devotion in one single Mass than another man in fifty, you will give more honor to God in that single Mass, and you will derive more benefit from it, in the way called *ex opere operato*, than the other will from his fifty. "In satisfaction," says St. Thomas, "the disposition of the person offering is more regarded than the quantity of the oblation."

It is, indeed, true that (as a grave author asserts) in certain cases one single Mass heard with extraordinary fervor and devotion may satisfy the justice of God for all the transgressions of a great sinner. And this is quite in harmony with what the Council of Trent teaches, namely: "That in the offering of this Holy Sacrifice, God grants the gift of repentance and then by means of this true repentance He pardons sins the most grave and enormous." Yet,

notwithstanding all this, since neither the interior dispositions with which you assist at Mass are manifest to yourself, nor the satisfaction which corresponds thereto, you ought to strive to hear as many Masses as you can, and with all the devotion possible, that you may more surely gain these great fruits of the Most Holy Sacrifice.

Blessed shall you be if you cherish a great confidence in the loving mercy of God, which shines forth so wonderfully in this most Holy Sacrifice. Thrice happy, above all, shall you be if you assist as often as possible with a lively faith and devout recollection at the Holy Sacrifice; for I am certain if you do this with perseverance you may have secure hope of escaping Purgatory and going straight to the bosom of God for ever in heaven. Go then to Mass, go regularly to Mass, and never let such scandalous words escape you as, "A Mass more or less is of little consequence."

Our *third* debt is one of gratitude for the countless benefits which our most loving God has bestowed on us. Place together all the gifts and all the graces you have received from God; so many gifts of nature and grace, body, soul, senses, faculties and health, and life itself; add to all these the very life of His Son Jesus Christ, and the death that He suffered for love of us, and does not all this increase a thousand fold the debt you owe to God? But how shall we ever be sufficiently able to thank Him?

If the law of gratitude is observed by the wild beasts, whose fierce nature is often changed into gentleness towards their benefactors, how much more ought it not to be observed by man, gifted as he is with reason and so nobly endowed by the Divine liberality? But, unhappily, our poverty is so great that we have no means of making an adequate return for the least of these countless favors; as the very least of them, coming from the hand of a Majesty so grand, and accompanied as it is by an infinite love, acquires an infinite value and obliges us to an infinite correspondence in the way of reverence and love.

O poor and wretched creatures that we are! If we cannot repay one single benefit, how can we ever be able to pay so many and so countless? Then we are thus placed in the cruel necessity of

living and dying, ungrateful to our Supreme Benefactor.

But, thank God, this shall not be, for the manner of showing our gratitude to that good Benefactor and of fully requiting Him for all His favors is taught us by the Royal Prophet, who, led by Divine inspiration, clearly indicates that nothing save the Holy Mass can render due thanks to God.

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me?" says this holy King; and then, answering himself, he continues: "I will take the cup of salvation" (or, according to another version, "I will raise on high the chalice of the Lord,") that is, I will offer a sacrifice most acceptable to Him, and with this alone I shall satisfy the debt of so many and such favors.

Remember also that the Sacrifice was instituted by our Redeemer principally for this end, that is, to acknowledge the Divine bounty and as a *thank-offering* to His goodness. Hence it is called the *Eucharistic* Sacrifice, and the *Eucharist* or *Thank-offering*. He Himself gave us the example, when at the Last Supper before consecration, in that first Mass, He raised His eyes to heaven, and gave thanks to His heavenly Father.

O divine thanksgiving, which discovers to us the sublime end for which this tremendous Sacrifice was instituted, and which invites us to conform ourselves to our Head; so that at every Mass at which we assist we may know how to make good use of so great a treasure, by offering it in gratitude to our Supreme Benefactor. And that we may perform this great act with greater zeal and devotion, let us always remember that all Paradise, the Blessed Virgin and the Angels and Saints rejoice when we offer this our tribute of thanks to so great a King.

We read in the life of the Venerable Sister Francesca Farnese, that her whole life was troubled with a thousand anxieties how she could return love for love to God. She often lamented to see herself covered over from head to foot with Divine blessings, without knowing how to return adequate thanks to her Lord for the least of these benefits bestowed on her. On one of these occasions, the Blessed Virgin appeared to Francesca, and placed the heavenly Babe, her Divine Son, in Francesca's arms. "Take Him," she said, "for He is yours, and with Him

alone you will easily discharge all your obligations to His Father."

O, thrice blessed Mass, which places the Son of God not only in our arms, but also in our heart! *A little child has been given to us*, that we may be able to do with Him, Him alone, what would be otherwise impossible to our human weakness, as most assuredly with Him we can fully and adequately discharge the debt of gratitude we owe to Almighty God. Yea, in the Holy Mass, in a certain way, we give to God something more than what He has bestowed on us, not in reality of course, but in appearance; since once only the Eternal Father has given us His Divine Son in the Incarnation, while we give Him back to Him times without number, in the Most Holy Sacrifice.

Thus it seems we have the advantage, not indeed in the quality of the gift, since nothing greater than the Son of God could have been given us, but in appearance, in returning to Him so often and so continuously the self-same Gift. O great God! O most loving God! Would that we had tongues infinite in number and power to return Thee infinite thanks for so great a treasure! If hitherto it has lain a treasure hidden from you, now that you have begun to know its surpassing value, can you fail to exclaim over and over again, "O treasure of treasures! O treasure beyond all price?"

But the infinite benefit of Holy Mass does not end here, for it enables us also to pay the *fourth* debt due to God. I have already said that this debt obliges us to supplicate Him and to ask new graces of Him. You know full well that your necessities of soul and body are grievous and manifold; and you feel every moment of your existence how necessary it is to have recourse to Him, as He alone is the chief source, the beginning and the end of all your good, whether temporal or eternal. On the other hand, what heart can you have to ask for His favors, seeing the utter ingratitude which you have shown Him for the many graces already bestowed on you?

Have you not even turned the very graces He gave you into offences against Him? But still, let not your heart lose courage for if you have not deserved these graces our good Jesus has deserved them for you. In fact, for this end He has become

a pacifying Victim—a supplicatory sacrifice to obtain from the Eternal Father all things you may require.

In the Holy Mass our dear and beloved Jesus, who is our great High Priest, recommends our cause to His Father, prays for us, and becomes Himself our Advocate. If we knew that the Blessed Virgin was uniting with us in prayer to the Eternal Father, to obtain the graces we desired, what confidence we should have of being heard! What hope, then, what confidence should we not have, when we know that in the Mass, Jesus Himself prays for us, offers His most Precious Blood to the Eternal Father for us, and makes Himself our advocate. O thrice blessed Mass, thou art the mine of all our good!

But we must dig deeper into this mine in order to discover more of the vast treasures it contains. O what priceless gems of grace and virtue be there! O what precious gifts the Holy Mass draws down from Heaven! In the first place it calls down all spiritual graces, all the goods of the soul, such as true sorrow and repentance for sin, victory over temptations, no matter of what kind, whether from external trials, bad companions, and the infernal spirits, or those arising from the internal rebellion of our fallen nature. Yes, the Holy Mass obtains for us all those aids of grace which we need to rise from the mire of sin, to stand erect, and to walk forward in the ways of God.

It likewise brings us innumerable holy inspirations and internal impulses, which dispose us to shake off tepidity, and excite us to work out our salvation with greater fervor, with a more prompt will, and with a purer and more meritorious intention. These again contain an inestimable treasure, as they are the most efficacious means to obtain from God the grace of final perseverance—on which depends our eternal salvation—and a moral certainty of eternal bliss, as much as that certainty is vouchsafed to man during his mortal pilgrimage.

Furthermore, it calls down temporal blessings, inasmuch as they are conducive to the salvation of the soul; such as health of body, abundance, peace, and the exclusion of the contrary evils, such as pestilences, earthquakes, wars, famines, persecutions, hatreds, calumnies, and injuries of every sort.

In a word, the Holy Mass delivers us from all evil and enriches us with every good.

Truly, then, the Mass is the golden key of Paradise, and since the Eternal Father has given us this key, which of all His boundless treasures can He refuse us? *He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things?*

We can now easily understand why a holy priest used to say: "No matter how great the graces I ask of God for myself or others, as often as I celebrate Mass, they are nothing compared to the offering I make Him." He, indeed, reasoned justly when he added: "All the favors that I ask of God, when celebrating Holy Mass, are created and finite things, whereas the gifts I offer to Him are uncreated and infinite, and so to balance the account I become the creditor and He the debtor." This good priest by no means wished to deny that the power of offering the gift as well as the gift itself came first from God; but putting it thus, he asked great graces in the Holy Sacrifice, and received still greater.

And you, why do you not realize all this? Why is it you do not ask great graces at this favorable time? I earnestly advise and exhort you to ask God in every Mass, the grace to become a saint. Do you think I advise you to ask too much? Well, I tell you it is not too much. Has not our good and loving Master promised us in the Gospel that for a cup of cold water, given in His Name, He will bestow the Kingdom of Heaven? How, then, could He refuse us a hundred heavens, were there so many, in return for the Blood of His beloved Son, offered to Him on the altar?

How can you, therefore, doubt that He will give you every virtue, and all the perfections required to make you a saint, and a great saint in heaven? O blessed Mass! Let your heart's desires be then multiplied a thousand fold, and ask as much as you will; remembering always that you are asking of God, who cannot grow poor by giving, and, therefore, the more you ask, the more will He give you.

St. Bernard is emphatic on this truth: "More is gained," he says, "by one single Mass, than by distributing all your goods to the poor, or going on pilgrimages to all the most holy shrines in the

world." O boundless riches of Holy Mass! Let this truth sink deeply into your heart. By hearing or celebrating Holy Mass, considered in itself, and in its intrinsic worth, you can gain more merit before God, than by giving all your goods to the poor, or by going as a pilgrim through the entire world, or visiting with the utmost devotion the famous sanctuaries of Rome, of Compostella, or Loreto, Jerusalem, and all others throughout the universe.

This grand truth clearly follows from the doctrine laid down by St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, who says: "In each Mass are contained all the fruits, all the graces, yea, all those immense treasures which the Son of God poured out so abundantly upon the Church, His Spouse, in the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross." Now, pause a while; close this book; read no further at present, but sum up in your mind all the wonderful blessings of Holy Mass; weigh them well in silence; and then can you find any difficulty in believing that one Mass—viewed in its own intrinsic worth and value—is of such efficacy that, according to the Doctors of the Church, it might have sufficed to obtain the salvation of the whole human race?

Let us suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ had not suffered at all on Calvary, and that, instead of the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross, he had solely instituted the Mass for our Redemption, and with an express precept that it should be celebrated only *once* in the entire world. Well, now, had God been pleased to act thus, that a single Mass, celebrated by the poorest priest on earth, would suffice—considered in its intrinsic value—to obtain the conversion of all men. Yes, one single Mass—taking the case we have supposed—would be sufficient to convert all the Mahometans, infidels, schismatics, heretics and bad Christians throughout the world.

At the same time it would close the gates of hell and empty purgatory of all the souls suffering therein. But, alas, we unhappy creatures, thoughtless children of Adam, by our tepidity, want of devotion, and perhaps by our sins and iniquities committed during Mass, we narrow its unbounded extent, and we render its infinite treasures of no value.

Would that I could ascend to the summits of the

highest mountains and there cry aloud, so that the whole world might hear me: O foolish people, wretched inhabitants of the earth, what are you doing? Why do you not run to the churches to assist at every Mass celebrated therein? Why not imitate the holy angels, who, according to St. Chrysostom, descend in legions during Holy Mass and stand before the altar, covered with wings of reverence and holy awe, waiting there during the time of the august Sacrifice, in order to intercede more efficaciously for us, well knowing that this is the most fitting time, the very moment we require to obtain every blessing from Heaven.

Are you not now filled with shame and confusion when you remember how little value you have hitherto set on Holy Mass? But what shall I say of you if you are one of those who have said: a Mass more, or a Mass less, is of little importance!

And before concluding this instruction, let us remind you that it was not by mere accident I told you that one single Mass, as far as its intrinsic value is concerned, is sufficient to empty purgatory of all the souls who are being purified therein, and to lead them to the bosom of God in Paradise. For this Divine Sacrifice not only aids the souls of the dead in a propitiatory and satisfactory manner for the temporal punishment due to their sins, but it also avails them in a supplicatory manner—that is, it obtains for them their entire deliverance from purgatory.

Hence the custom of Holy Church, which not only offers the Mass for the souls in purgatory but prays for their entire deliverance. In order, then, that you may be excited to compassion for these Holy Souls shut out for a time from the Beatific Vision, let me remind you of the words of St. Gregory the Great, who in his *Dialogues* (I. 4. 6. 131.) says: "The flames of purgatory are, as it were, the instrument of Divine Justice, operating with such terrible power as to render the agony of the souls therein detained insufferable. These pains," continues the Saint, "far exceed all the tribulations or martyrdoms that can be witnessed, felt or even imagined in this life."

But still more excruciating than all this is the *pain of loss*; because being deprived of the beautiful vision of God, as the Angelic Doctor says, "They

experience an indescribable agony and a fierce and burning thirst to behold the Supreme Good, all which is denied to their unceasing yearnings." Here, now, enter into your own heart and realize the following truth—If you should at any time see your father and mother on the point of being drowned, and if you could save them by merely stretching out your hand, would you not feel yourself bound by the law of charity and of justice to stretch forth that hand to rescue them?

How, then, can you behold with the eyes of faith so many poor souls, perhaps your nearest and dearest friends, in a sea of fire, and yet remain so heartless as not to endure the trifling inconvenience of assisting with devotion at one Mass for their release, or the alleviation of their agonies? What an unfeeling heart is yours! Surely you cannot doubt that even a single Mass can bring exceeding great comfort to these poor souls.

Examples without end prove that charity or holy compassion for the poor souls will redound to your own welfare; but I will confine myself to one well authenticated in the life of St. Peter Damien. This holy servant of God, left an orphan at a tender age, was taken into the house of one of his brothers who treated him cruelly, making him go barefoot and in rags, and causing him to endure the privations and sufferings of a mendicant. It happened that one day he found a small sum of money on the road. He seemed to himself to have found a treasure.

But how was he to spend it? His miserable state—so poor and so friendless—suggested many ways; but after thinking the matter over and over again, he finally resolved to give it to a priest to celebrate Mass for the Holy Souls in purgatory. From that time forward his fortune was changed. He was adopted by another brother of an amiable disposition who took him into his house, treated him as his own child, clothed him, and sent him to school, whence he came forth a great man and a great saint, an ornament to the College of Cardinals and one of the most illustrious pillars of the Church.

Now you see how one single Mass, obtained at a slight personal inconvenience, all the happiness of this great Saint and Doctor of the Church had its origin. O Most Holy Mass! which at the same

time assists the living and the dead! O Most Holy Sacrifice, replete with blessings for time and for eternity! you must bear in mind that the souls in purgatory are so grateful to their benefactors that when once in heaven, they become their advocates. They never cease to intercede for their benefactors until they see them in eternal glory.

I earnestly implore you who read this little work not to close it until you have made a firm resolution of henceforth employing all possible diligence in assisting at Mass, and of causing as many Masses to be celebrated as your means permit, not only for the souls in purgatory, but also for your own soul, and the souls of your friends and benefactors. Two motives should induce you to do this: first, that you may obtain the blessing of a holy death, for it is the opinion of holy and learned divines that there is no more powerful or efficacious means than Holy Mass to obtain this greatest of all graces.

St. Mechtilde is said to have heard from our beloved Lord Himself, that whoever during life has been accustomed to hear Mass devoutly, shall in death be consoled by the presence of the Angels and Saints and his advocates, who shall safely defend him from all the assaults of the infernal fiends. O what a happy and holy death shall you have, if during life you shall have endeavored to hear Mass as often as possible!

The second motive is, that you yourself may obtain a speedy release from purgatory, and wing your way to eternal glory, since there is no surer means of receiving from God a grace so precious as that of going direct to heaven, or at least with a short purgatory, than Indulgences and the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Popes have drawn largely on the treasures of the Church to aid the Holy souls by the many Indulgences they have granted for them.

And as to the efficacy of the Holy Mass in hastening their deliverance from purgatory, this is

already sufficiently proved in what I have already said. But, if you need anything more on this subject, the example and the authority of the great servant of God, John of Avila, the oracle of Spain, ought to suffice. Being asked in his last hours, on his death-bed, what he most earnestly wished to be done for him after death, he answered, "Masses, Masses."

And now before dismissing this matter, allow me to give you a counsel of great moment. Try to get all the Masses which you would wish to have celebrated for you after your death offered now whilst you have life and strength. Do not trust to those who may survive you for the fulfilment of this duty. I am the more anxious to impress this on you, as St. Anselm holds that one Mass heard or celebrated for you during life may, perhaps, be more meritorious than a thousand celebrated after your death.

This truth was understood well by a wealthy Genoese merchant, who at his death left nothing for his own soul. Every one was astonished that a man so rich, so pious and so generous to all could have been so cruel to himself at the hour of death. But after his burial there was found a record in one of his diaries of what he had done for his soul during life. I here copy some of the entries: "Masses caused to be celebrated for my soul, two thousand lire; for the marriage of poor girls, ten thousand; for such and such a holy sanctuary, two hundred;" and so on.

At the end of this book he wrote: "He who wishes to do good, let him do it during life; nor trust to those who may survive him." A very trite old proverb teaches us "That a taper before gives more light than a torch behind." Weigh seriously the excellence of Holy Mass, and you will henceforth be astonished at the blindness in which you lived till now, having disregarded a treasure so great, so immense, and which was, indeed, for you a "Hidden Treasure."